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ABSTRACT

Human resources management personnel have been encouraged to develop a job analysis approach capable of grasping work situations that are more complex, less defined, and in a state of flux. In France, this perspective has given rise to Emploi Type Etudie dans sa Dynamique (ETED) or "typical job studied in its dynamic," an approach that reflects the goal of generating job descriptions and the need to take the dynamic, fluid context of work situations into acccunt. Competences in the ETED approach are understood as knowledge, abilities, and qualities in action. Jobs represent the meeting point of two levels--the organization and abilities of the job holder, and ETED analyzes them in this double context. Relative to these jobs, the concrete forms of particular work situations tend to vary depending on choices or local circumstances (variability) and according to the way the job-holder fills the job (elasticity). Variability and elasticity reflect the two kinds of dynamics the ETED approach seeks to bring out: individual advances in the mastery of the job and emerging structural movements significant for development of the occupations. They are identified as development trends (factors of change that influence the jobs studied) and job bracket (a basic core that corresponds to the activity common to experienced employees and possible extensions that exceed the core). The ETED analysis allows the work situations described to be placed in context while emphasizing their complexity and brings out collective reference units through the groups of typical jobs it proposes. (Contains 10 references) (YLB)

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Training & Employment

A FRENCH NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

ANALYSIS OF WORK: DESCRIBING COMPETENCES THROUGH A DYNAMIC APPROACH TO JOBS

Increasing numbers of players in the various areas of human resources management (HRM) are "going back" to the analysis of jobs, competences and changes to arrive at what is generally called the "shift to the logic of competences". Such a development may reflect current trends affecting the production system and thus calling for a review of different approaches to it. Placing the work activity at the heart of these movements clearly opens new perspectives but also requires an in-depth analysis of methodology.

Work flexibility, a challenge to the analysis of jobs and competences

If we take a rapid look at recent changes in the production system, the period from the 1960s to the end of the 1970s may be contrasted to the trend that got underway in the 1980s and has continued to the present day. The key stages are the beginning of the crisis around 1975 and the movement of forward-looking job management (*gestion prévisionnelle des emplois*, GPE) that emerged in the early 1980s; while the term 'competence' was rarely used in the 1970s, it became inescapable in the 1980s. During the first phase, change was most often perceived as a break between periods of stability, with technology constituting the main factor behind such developments. This perspective gave rise to questions about what changes in jobs and what training were necessary to adapt the workforce in the face of the new technologies and techniques. The idea was to forecast and adapt, with the expectation of changing professions several times in the course of working life. At that point, the essential role of HRM on the one hand or the educational system on the other was carrying out the forecasts and furthering the adaptation of the labour force. Career counselling, meanwhile, was based on a stock of reliable information about different occupations.

By the end of the 1970s, however, this deterministic vision was coming up against reactions from the field. New technologies, and particularly information technologies, were generally associated with (and a medium for) other changes leading to new products or services, for example, or new organisation. Furthermore, these technologies inherently opened up various choices of technical solutions. This intrinsic quality related to their "user-friendliness" led users to "demand more from the machine", to "look for other solutions". This period was particularly favourable, in sectors where the work was relatively less predefined than in industrial production, to the revelation of the weight that job-holders might exert on their own job and, collectively, on the development of an occupation (Mandon and Rannou 1984, Mandon 1988).

The resulting changes–new goods and services, changing technical possibilities and new ways of applying them, new principles of organisation such as company networks, decompartmentalisation of departments, flexibility–led to relative instability within the companies, and more generally on the labour market (via unemployment, restructuring, etc.). Rather than forecasting and adapting, as had been the case in the past, it was necessary to anticipate and mobilise the means to face these changing situations.

The players were thus in search of other frames of reference. The growing instability of work situations led observers of industrial relations to signal the perturbation of existing systems. A decade ago, Jean-Daniel Reynaud concluded that forms of workforce management would become increasingly individualised, departing from a single model. He predicted the growing recourse to individual

negotiation on the one hand and outside certifications on the other; in his view, the diploma was an increasingly important point of reference because it seemed to be the only solid, stable one (Reynaud 1988).

Among researchers, the main findings about these transformations led to renewed emphasis on concepts and methodology concerning the analysis of jobs and the changes they undergo. The recurrent problems of HRM encouraged the development of an approach capable of grasping work situations that were more complex, less defined, and above all in a state of flux. This perspective, combining sociological research and detailed analysis of jobs, gave rise to the approach known as ETED (Emploi Type Etudié dans sa Dynamique, typical job studied in its dynamic). The name ETED reflects both the goal of generating descriptions of "typical jobs" (grouping work situations) and the need to take the dynamic, fluid context of work situations into account.

Placing competences in context: the analysis of jobs beyond the work station

While an activity generally remains defined by its "technical" production, the rapid succession of products and the related idea of service (personalisation, closer ties with the client) and the decompartmentalisation of company functions, as well as management constraints (rigor and analytical follow-up), require all jobs to integrate new dimensions into their technical aspect per se. In particular, the totality of the data related to the necessary collaborations and exchanges with others, information gathering and renewed appeals for same precludes reducing an individual's working area to the sphere of the group or department to which he or she is administratively attached. In addition, it is necessary to take into account data on deadlines, for example, which determine the way that each person plans and organises his or her work.

To address competences, the ETED analysis sheds light on a given work situation as it is experienced and structured by the person holding the job. In particular, it explores his or her overall objective and desired results, which determine the action undertaken. It does not, however, study problem-solving mechanisms–what happens in the "black box" of mental processes. This definition of competences is consistent with the basic conception of the ETED approach: the nature of change and the role of the individual in the production structure. Competences are understood as "knowing how to draw on one's knowledge, abilities and qualities to deal with a problem at hand", or, in other words, as knowledge, abilities and qualities **in action**. They involve a "reactive encounter" between an individual's past experience–and his or her potential–and the situation that mobilises them and thus reveals this potential.

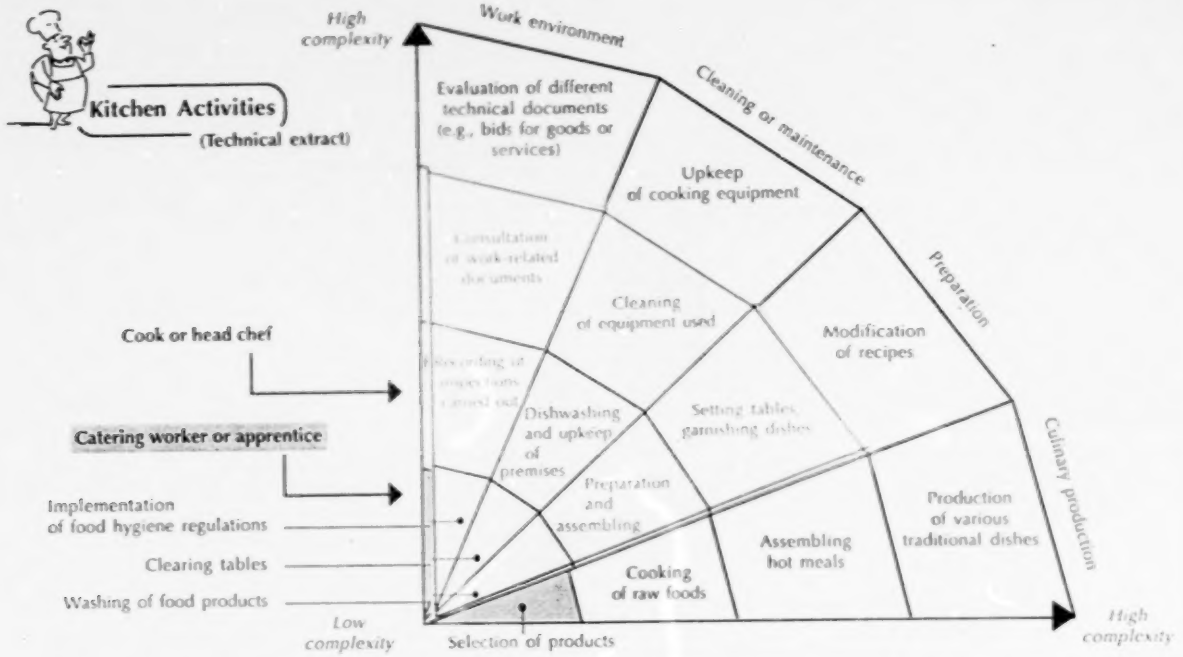
In this approach, the notion of competence basically serves an heuristic function. The competences understood in this way can certainly be "subject" to management, but never as autonomous units that could be separated from their context through the application of quantitative rules of management. Competences emerge in a work situation, and they become meaningful in three different perspectives: the productive function of the situation, career development, or a diploma-granting training programme. Competences thus assume their full meaning in relation to broader, aggregate units that constitute collective points of reference developped by the players involved.

The notion of the typical job in a dynamic situation

One of the features of the ETED approach thus stems from the level of job analysis that it favours, which might be described as a "meso" level situated between approaches focussing on the individual (cognitive psychology, human engineering) and those focussing on the organisation (labour economics, organisational sociology). More specifically, it sets itself apart from both a vision of jobs determined by the organisation where they exist (or, in the extreme, by economic determinants) and an ontological representation of competences as natural abilities proper to the individual. For the ETED approach, jobs represent the meeting point of these two levels, and it only analyses them in the double context of this encounter and the characteristics of the job-holders. Once again, such a procedure is perfectly consistent with the definition of competences that it proposes.

The results of the investigation are presented under a series of headings. An introductory section situates the major currents represented by the jobs studied. Specific employment situations are grouped together by precise criteria, and in particular, according to their socioproductive role. This is defined on the basis of 1) their relative impact on the overall objective of the production process/service (i.e., the job's productive output); 2) its position as between internal (or internal and external) participants; 3) the particular nature of the situations addressed in terms of data taken into account by the job-holder (indication of complexity). The singularity of the cases is not effaced but, on the contrary, utilised to develop descriptions of typical jobs, also known as "occupational" jobs (*emplois métiers*). Relative to these jobs, the concrete forms of particular work situations tend to vary, on the one hand depending on choices or local circumstances (make-up of the work group, management "style", client environment, etc.), which will be termed *variability*, and on the other hand, according to the way that the job-holder fills his or her job, extending it and giving it a particular "colour" or not, which will be characterised as *elasticity*. In other words, the typical (or occupational) job constitutes a cumulative image of different concrete situations in this space where individuals are not always interchangeable. This cumulative space then permits the articulation of collective and individual management while recognising both variability and elasticity.

The two notions of variability and elasticity thus reflect the two kinds of dynamics that the ETED approach seeks to bring out: individual advances in the mastery of the



The study of catering jobs (community catering, restaurants and food-processing industries) confirms the presence of posts relating to culinary production and assembly in all three activity sectors. However, only the production jobs--those held by the cooks--allow career advancement towards supervisory and managerial activities.
The ETED method allows us to analyse the competences involved in these different jobs and the various possibilities for advancement among the activities involved. These activities have been defined in terms of technical skills, organisation/ management and interpersonal relations/communications. The case of technical activities is detailed above. Apprentice chefs and catering workers carry out overlapping activities, such as the choice and preparation of products (with quality controls and definition of quantities to be used). Access to the positions of cook or head chef follows responsibilities for the cooking of raw food products, then those that are combined, and finally a diversity of dishes. The division in the handling of the jobs, which hinders the advancement of assembly personnel to the preparation of hot dishes, largely reflects a traditional form of management that is not insurmountable. This observation is confirmed by the fact that the French educational system has agreed to a revamping of its diplomas on the basis of this study, while the community catering professionals have accepted it as a reference for the creation of branch titles validating the work experience of their personnel.

Source: Sylvie-Anne Mériot, *La restauration collective : analyse des besoins de formation pour une rénovation des diplômes* [Community Catering: Analysis of Training Needs for Revising Diplomas], Céreq Document no. 129 (January 1998), 150 pp.

job and emerging structural movements that may be significant for the development of the occupations. In order to facilitate their conceptualisation, the method identifies them under two headings: "development trends" and "job bracket".

The **development trends** category singles out the factors of change that influence the jobs studied: these are economic and technical, but also have to do with work organisation, recruitment sources, legislation, and so on. It indicates the sensitive areas or aspects of the activity that are likely to be modified. These are all "signals" that call for special attention.

The **job bracket** will be structured around a basic core that corresponds to the activity common to experienced job-holders in this post (generally at the end of the period of time deemed necessary to "feel at ease"), and the possible or observed extensions that exceed this hard core. The different ways of occupying this space or advancing in it may distinguish different career paths linking this typical (or occupational) job or trade to others (i.e., to define a career plan).

An approach that deals with several levels of information

The identification of typical jobs requires a large quantity of contextual information, which is acquired throughout the analytical approach. These so-called "framing" data are intended to allow understanding of the present context, the trends or issues confronting the jobs studied, and their role in day-to-day operations. They permit the definition of the field of observation and the identification of a sampling of specific situations to be investigated, and they are indispensable for understanding and interpreting the situations observed. The framing data also allow the identification of the players who will be called upon in the course of the study, for purposes of comparison and validation of results (organisation of follow-up groups).

The jobs to be studied are approached gradually, step by step. These steps provide a series of "zooms" through which information is gathered at several levels in order to choose the specific work situations in the most relevant

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possible way; the principle of "sampling" used is different from the notion of representativeness in the statistical sense. The involvement of the players is an inseparable part of the method.

Information gathering on the jobs themselves is carried out in two stages. The first consists of an interview with the immediate supervisor of the selected job-holders. It provides information about the way work groups function and the "expectations" relative to the job studied (its "attributions"). Subsequently, the job-holders, interviewed individually, are invited to describe their work as precisely as possible, and this description constitutes the raw material for the analysis per se of the work.

This analysis involves first of all a reorganisation of the job-holders' discourse in order to bring out the data that the individual takes into account and the goals he or she sets. By combining the analyses of individual situations, it becomes possible to construct a representation of the occupational space (the job bracket mentioned above) by indicating the paths of advancement and the different steps along the way. (See inset for an application of this method to the community catering sector.) The typical job specifications are then validated and possibly refined by reviewing them with the job-holders involved.

Specific advantages of such an approach to jobs and competences

Where Taylorism sought to standardise work, notably through the preparation that was entrusted to the methods departments and through mechanisation, today's production system places greater reliance on human intelligence and develops complex work situations. At the same time, the training apparatus seeks to take into account the uncertainties of the labour market on the one hand and new forms of training (such as alternating training and "life-long" continuing training) on the other.

Thus, when work is to be analysed, either to create guidelines for trainers or to develop specifications for human resources managers, it is important to take into account the many factors, both individual and organisational, that weigh on job content. The ETED analysis allows the work situations described to be placed in context while emphasising their complexity, and it brings out collective reference units through the groupings of typical (or occupational) jobs that it proposes. Indeed, it is probably the level of analysis offered that explains its utilisation in the field of training as well as in human resources management.

Nicole Mandon and Emmanuel Sulzer

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